



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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### UZB42312.E

Uzbekistan: Treatment of political dissidents or members of the opposition and their family members 1999-2004  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

The Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan states in Article 34 that citizens "[...] have the right to associate in [...] political parties" and that "no one may abridge the rights, freedoms, or dignity of persons who represent an opposition minority political party, social association, popular movement, or representative agency of power" (Uzbekistan 8 Dec. 1992). In practice, however, Uzbeks do not enjoy freedom of expression (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, intro.; HRW 2003; IHRC 13 Jan. 2003; AI 5 Dec. 2003).

Despite President Islam Karimov's claims to favour a parliamentary system similar to that of the United Kingdom where the government is held accountable to the people (OneWorld 30 Sept. 2003), the government of Uzbekistan does not allow opposition political parties to register or to participate in federal elections (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, intro.). In 2002 the government abolished official censorship, but this did not amount to substantial changes in the tactics used to repress any opposition (Freedom House 17 July 2003). Since the early 1990's, many opposition party leaders have been forced to flee Uzbekistan (Eurasianet 27 Jan. 2003). Some have been imprisoned for attempting to overthrow the government; others remain on a type of probation (ibid.). Security forces continue to use surveillance (HRW 25 Nov. 2003) and wiretaps and monitor telephone calls of persons suspected of belonging to the political opposition (*Country Reports 2002*, 31 Mar. 2003, sec. 1.f).

The 2001 amnesty that saw the release of 860 religious and political prisoners did not constitute an end to police harassment (HRW 2003; CSM 5 July 2002). Indeed, many of the released prisoners were forced to officially renounce any participation in political meetings or demonstrations, or else reject their religious faith (HRW 2003). A more recent presidential amnesty has led to the release of over 3,000 prisoners, of which nearly 400 were serving sentences for "anti-constitutional activities" (BBC 24 Jan. 2004). Authorities purposely stalled meetings of the Erk Democratic Party, and beat, detained, and imprisoned many party members (HRW 25 Nov. 2003).

According to the deputy director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia, "Brutal persecution of the political opposition is unfortunately routine here. ... Although the government claims to be responding to calls to reduce torture and increase democratic participation, perceived opposition to the government is often met with violence" (HRW 30 Sept. 2003). The UN special rapporteur on torture Theo van Boven said that torture "has a nature of being systematic..." in Uzbekistan, especially when it comes to dissidents and members of opposition parties (AFP 6 Dec. 2002).

In February 2002, a court in Tashkent sentenced four policemen to 20 years in prison each for the beating death of one detainee and the maiming of another, both of whom had been arrested because of ties to an opposition Islamic group (AP 5 Mar. 2002). Members of the police forces and the National Security Services (NSS) "tortured, beat, and harassed" civilians, sometimes to the point of death with almost total impunity (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, intro.).

Approximately 6,500 persons were incarcerated in 2002 for political or religious motives (HRW 2003), most notably because of alleged links with Islamic political groups but also for belonging to secular opposition groups or human rights organizations (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, intro.). About 10 per cent of prison inmates are being held on political or religious grounds (BBC 24 Jan. 2004).

In addition to having to deal with "atrocious" prison conditions including lack of food, medical care, heating, and other basic necessities, political and religious prisoners also are subjected to daily humiliation because of their politics or religious beliefs (HRW 2003). Objecting to this treatment resulted in violent physical or sexual abuse, solitary confinement, and denial of food and water (ibid.). Since 1998 at least 38 political prisoners have been executed, on charges of murder and "terrorism," after trials that were not up to international standards (AI 18 Nov. 2003).

The Uzbek Government considers peaceful dissident Muslims as a political threat (BBC 24 Jan. 2004). Members of the banned Hizb-ut-Tahrir Party (the Islamic Party of Liberation), which seeks to create an Islamic state, are particularly targeted (Freedom House 17 July 2003). Suspected members have been forced to confess under conditions of torture, and their family members face interrogation, arrest, and extortion (ibid.). The Islamic Human Rights Commission (IHRC), based in the United Kingdom, states that the arbitrary detention of thousands of civilians because of their supposed Islamist sympathies has begun to include veiled women and students of religion (IHRC 13 Jan. 2003).

Many women who were demanding the release of their husbands who were jailed because of links to the Hizb ut-Tahrir party were themselves arrested and/or beaten by police (*Country Reports 2002*, 31 Mar. 2003, sec. 2.b; HRW 2003). The women, sometimes detained with their children, were often incarcerated for 15 days, occasionally even before they arrived at the protest site (ibid.).

While *Country Reports 2002* maintains that there were no reports of the public humiliation of relatives of alleged religious extremists (31 Mar. 2003, sec. 1.f), IHRC has reported that the public humiliation of family members of jailed Islamist suspects persists, including neighbourhood level denunciations are common (13 Jan. 2003).

According to *Country Reports 2002*, "it has been common government practice to arrest, detain, and mistreat both immediate and extended family members of those the government sought to arrest" (31 Mar. 2003, sec. 1.d) or who had been detained (AI 18 Nov. 2003; HRW 29 Nov. 2003). Human Rights Watch reported in 2003 that Uzbek authorities would threaten family members of suspects in order to force them to cooperate with their operations (HRW 2003).

Family members of several political prisoners who died during their incarceration, some from apparent torture, others for suspicious reasons blamed on natural causes by the authorities, were warned by officials not to publicize the death of their relative(s) (*Country Reports 2002* 31 Mar. 2003, sec. 1.a). When the family of Erk member Hasan Kambarov spoke out about their relative's suspicious disappearance, police threatened family members and beat Kambarov's wife during questioning (HRW 25 Nov. 2003). In August 1999, the chief editor of Erk's newspaper was sentenced to eight years in prison and his family was subjected to torture, psychological pressure and threats of rape in order to force his confession (RSF2003).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim to refugee status or asylum. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

IRB Databases

Dialog

#### **Internet Sites, including:**

sylum Law

International Helsinki Federation

Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

UK Home Office

United Nations

#### **Search Engine:**

Google

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